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How to avoid frozen plumbing

As the temperatures fall, your anxiety about frozen pipes should not rise. There are steps you can take to protect your pipes and prevent future problems. So, get going before the cold comes.

The household pipes that are most susceptible to freezing are those in unheated areas, such as attics or crawl spaces. Some poorly insulated exterior walls may also prove to be a nuisance for pipes that run next to them. Consider, too, your outside faucets and pipes in outbuildings.

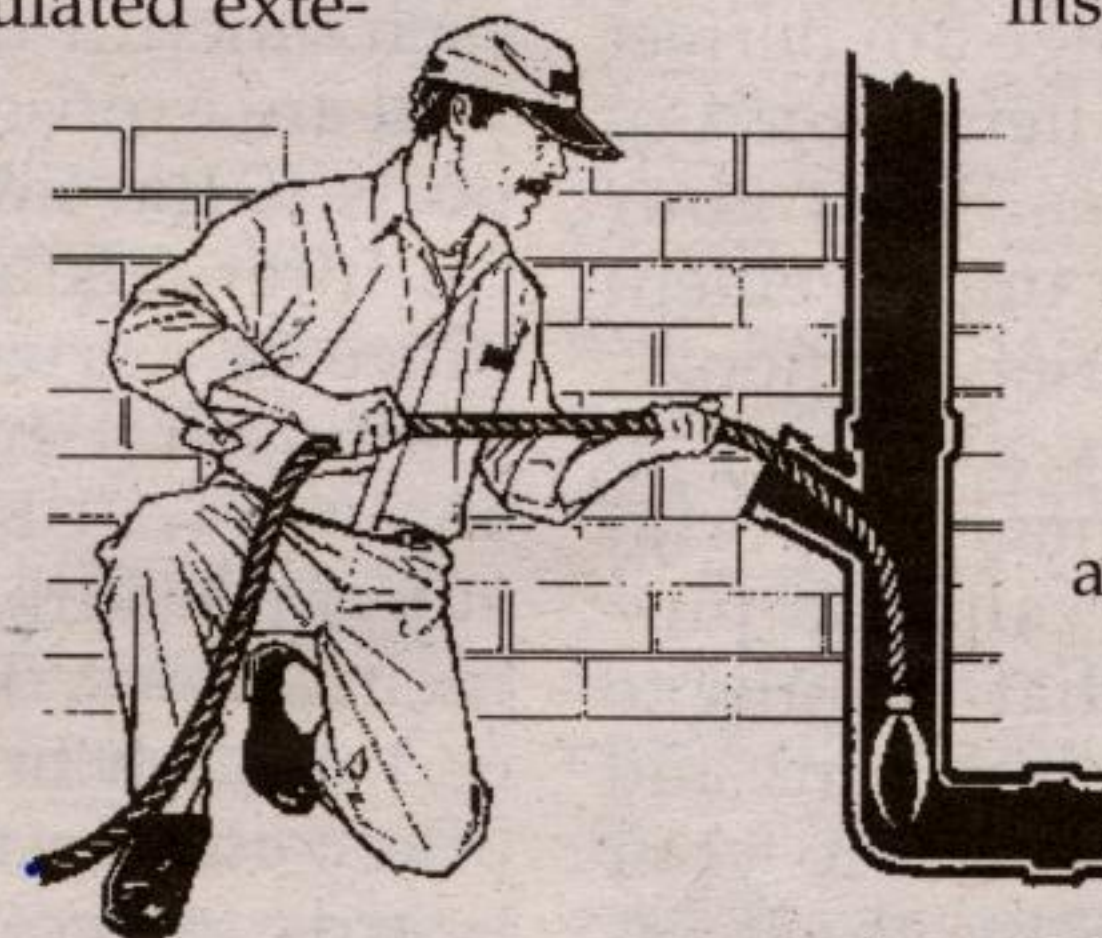
The best way to save pipes is to drain them in the fall and not use them again until the spring. Of course this isn't possible for most homeowners, but if you have a vacation home or are leaving your home for an extended period of time, try it. If at all possible, you should also drain the pipes that lead to outside faucets. To do so, close the shutoff valve that can be found about three feet from the outside wall. Then, go outside, turn on the faucet, let it drain and leave it open until spring.

Not all pipes can be drained, but they still need to be protected from freezing. Pipes you can reach should be wrapped with electrical heating cable. You can purchase this at your local hardware store. Make sure you read the instructions so you don't get cable that requires constant monitoring. After wrapping the pipes with the insulator, plug the cable

into a regular wall socket and heat will be supplied to the pipes at risk. If you have plastic plumbing, place electrical heating cable inside the pipes and then wrap them in plumbing insulation. Check with your hardware store representative to determine which product will work best for your needs.

If you cannot reach your pipes, inspect the walls surrounding them. If you discover holes, caulk or fill them with foam.

The air trapped between the wall and the pipes will serve as an insulator just as the dead air space between your roof and walls and insulation keeps the warm air



trapped inside your home during the winter.

If the pipes are behind a wall, cut a small hole and put in a louvered heating vent. You can keep this vent closed until the weather becomes cold. Then just open the vent and the heat from that particular room will seep through the louvers and surround the pipes, keeping them from freezing.

If you have taken these precautions and are still unsure about your pipes freezing in below 0 temperatures, you can always leave a trickle of water flowing from the faucet. The old saying, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," in this case, could be very true. This kind of ice water is not what you need.

—By Kathy Scott, special



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